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Student Agency for Democratic Culture in Schools:

A Thematic Analysis of The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

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Neoliberal education paradigm consists of theories such as human capital theory and social capital theory. The aim of neoliberal education paradigm is to increase the effectiveness of education systems. Effective education systems are expected to integrate students to the work force to create a prosperous society with a more opportunities for work and in life for the citizens. Schooling practices such as classrooms, subjects, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are structured based on this paradigm. Decisionmakers are more influential on these practices than students. In that context, neoliberal education paradigm limits the democratic practices in education and ignores promoting democratic culture in schools.

Creating democratic culture in schools and education requires a student-centered approach. The Council of Europe published “the reference framework of competences for democratic culture” as the core of the “free to speak, safe to learn – democratic schools for all” campaign in 2018. The framework aims to increase the students’ competences so that they can deal with complex social issues in Europe, such as populism and extremism, within democracy. The framework offers a student-centered approach to schooling.

The aim of this study is to analyze how the framework define student agency in relation to creating democratic culture in schools for Europe. The research questions for the analysis are “How does the framework define student agency in relation to democratic culture in schools?” and “How does the framework connect student agency and school context?”. The framework is analyzed by using thematic analysis. The themes that I have developed in my analysis are: democratic environment in schools; conventional approaches to schooling; teachers teaching the competences; students as democratic agents. The research paradigm relies on poststructuralism and critical pedagogy.

The framework adapts a student-centered approach and aims to create a space for students to practice their agency in all aspects of schooling. Students are expected to be autonomous individuals who can function in a democracy. However, some practices are under the influence of neoliberal education paradigm. Democratic culture is to be promoted by questioning and changing the neoliberal schooling practices and the methods to teach democracy. Schooling practices is to be inclusive to create a more robust democratic platform for every stakeholder of the school community to practice democracy.

Keywords: Democratic education; democracy; poststructuralism; critical pedagogy; neoliberalism, thematic analysis

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# 1 Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore, Indian Nobel laureate, portrays the life of a parrot in his short story “the parrot’s training” (Tagore, 1918). The beautiful and colorful parrot flies around and sings all day with joy and curiosity. The Raja (Indian king or prince) wants the best for the parrot. He thinks that the parrot wastes his time and learns nothing at all because the parrot does not read the scriptures that are necessary for everyone to be considered as educated. So, the Raja orders his servants to build the most comfortable golden cage for the parrot to keep it in and help it to concentrate on learning the scriptures that are necessary to become an educated parrot. It takes some time for the Raja’s servants to build the cage, bring the necessary scriptures, invite the most knowledgeable supervisors, and of course, the police that can keep the parrot in line. In the end, the system that is built for the parrot’s training is presented to the Raja. The Raja asks for the bird, but the servants show him how the system works. The Raja was impressed and told them to continue with this good system. Then while busy with all this fancy system, they forget to see the parrot. They were so happy with the system that they think it was for the parrot’s benefit. Buried into the scriptures and the cage, the parrot forgets to sing and fly, and its colors fade away. The parrot finally passes away. When they check the parrot, the only thing that they can hear is the sound of the scriptures that they think is beneficial for the parrot. When the Raja and his servants learned this, it was too late.

Rabindranath Tagore’s critique of the education system is still relatable today because the aim and the structure of education systems are not built around what students wish to learn. The goal of education systems is to contribute to the countries’ development with the best performance possible. The discourse(s) that defines what development is, has an influence on education as well. For instance, according to human capital theory, the best option to develop a country is to be able to calculate the rates of return of an education system. To reach this goal, it is crucial to systematize education and increase its effectiveness to reach better economic gains. The expected outcome is to create a wealthy nation with a prosperous life that can result in a better society. I touch upon further this discussion in the following chapter but here I will name this type of approach as the neoliberal education paradigm. My conclusion on this paradigm is that educational practices in this paradigm are not democratic enough.

The education systems are built based on questions such as what we are doing, how we are doing it, how we can increase the efficiency of education systems better. “Why are we struc-

turing the education systems that way” is a less frequently asked question because there is a fixed answer for this; the development of the nation. The objects of the education systems are the students. Every education system aims the best for the students. What is intended with education makes us decide how to structure education systems but the students’ expectation from education does not affect how to structure education as much. In other words, it is possible to ask how much students have a say on what is “the best” for them? This can be considered as a starting point to ponder over the student agency.

The contexts and issues that the education systems deal with are also part of how they are structured. The Council of Europe published the reference framework of competences for democratic culture in April 2018 as the core of “free to speak-safe to learn, democratic schools for all” campaign, which will take four years between 2018 and 2022. It aims to tackle issues such as populism and extremism by promoting democratic culture in schools throughout the member countries. The framework aims to achieve this goal by integrating the competences, which are listed as the descriptors of the observable behaviors, in schools so that students can acquire these necessary competences to become engaged and autonomous democratic citizens. Some guidance and practices in the framework place the student and student’s political power in school in the center of education. The framework offers guidance for various contexts. The guidance in the framework aims to organize all aspects of schooling around students, being in the center of education. The framework presents some alternatives to the neoliberal education paradigm up to some extent.

The framework has not been discussed in detail so far. Various aspects of the framework can be analyzed and discussed such as intercultural dialogue, citizenship education, or *Bildung*. Since the framework offers a wide variety of discussion on various aspects of it, researches and studies on the framework can contribute to education, schooling, and democracy in Europe. My aim is to focus on and understand how the framework defines student agency to promote democratic culture in the school context.

Some articles mention the framework in academic databases. I have searched various databases such as JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, Springer Link (one ref), Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, EBSCO, ProQuest, and DOAJ by using the title of the framework as the search phrase. I found the following articles in relation to the framework; Biseth, Madsen, and Christensen (2018), Baily (2018), Hammer and Schanke (2018), and Nuissi and Sava (2018). However, none of these studies discuss the concept of student agency or the framework. I believe

that this framework can be an opportunity to discuss the concept of student agency and how student-centered and democratic the schools are.

In the following chapter, I attempted to understand the concept of agency from humanist and poststructuralist perspectives. However, my aim is not to compare and contrast them. Discussing these two perspectives allowed me and guided me to establish an understanding of the concept of agency around discussions such as agency, rational and non-rational individual, individual-society dualism, and universal rationalism. Based on these discussions, I problematized the concept of student agency in the schooling practices and theories that are based on the neoliberal education paradigm. I concluded this chapter with how critical pedagogy offers a more robust democracy and democratic practices in schools compared to neoliberal education paradigm that is discussed in the previous section. I conducted thematic analysis to develop themes that helped me to analyze the framework. In chapter three, I give more information about the framework as well as the steps that I followed for the research. Chapter four presents the themes and findings of the research as a result of my analysis on the framework. I have presented four themes which are “democratic environment in school”, “conventional approaches to schooling”, “teachers teaching the competences”, and “students as democratic agents”.

In chapter five, I have discussed the findings in two sections; internal and external dynamics which have influence on schooling and student as an active democratic agent in school. I argue that even though the framework positions the student in the center of the education, there are some elements inherited from neoliberal education paradigm. At this point, the critical pedagogy can contribute to this discussion to reach a more robust democracy and democratic practices in schools and enhance the impact of student-centered approach suggested in the framework. And After that chapter, I present the conclusion and following chapters are on ethical considerations, limitations of this study and further research possibilities.

The epistemological orientation in this thesis is social constructionism. Knowledge (or reality) cannot be based on one universal truth. Knowledge is a concept that is related to the context in which it is constructed (O’ Dowd, 2011, p. 41). Social interactions are the foundation for an analysis to understand the concepts that are constructed in a society (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p. 161). Considering that the relationships are the basis to create knowledge, it is important to understand how the individual is constructed in a society. For a social scientist, it is possible to use the advantage of being a part of the society to have a better understanding of the dis-

courses and deconstruct them to analyze (O'dowd, 2011, p. 44). As a researcher, my understanding of the concept of student agency in the framework is only one of many possible analyses.

The theories that I have utilized are critical pedagogy, as the implementation of critical theory in the field of education, and poststructuralism. Poststructuralism concerns with the relationship of how human beings create meaning through communication and it questions how this relationship creates the culture that influences human beings (Belsey, 2002, p. 5). Poststructuralism does not depend on individual-society dualism while questioning the concepts such as discourse, culture and agency (Davies, 1991, p. 43). From a poststructuralist point of view, individual and agency cannot be understood based on a prescribed definition. That helped me to understand and analyze the norms and the concept of agency in my analysis.

Critical pedagogy is an attempt to analyze the power structures in the field of education and how they are understood in the school context. Critical pedagogy looks for not only an emancipatory process for the individual but also looks for an opportunity for social change and social justice (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 22). Critical pedagogy also analyzes the politics of schooling and the actors involved. In that sense, critical pedagogy gave me a perspective on how student agency can be related to building democratic culture in schools in the framework. I will elaborate more on the research paradigm while discussing poststructuralism and critical pedagogy in the following chapter.

## **2 Student Agency and Democratic Education**

### **2.1 Individual Self and Agency**

In this section, I will discuss the concept of agency. The concept of agency has a “slippery” nature which has been discussed in different disciplines and fields for a long time, such as sociology, social psychology and philosophy (Hitlin & Elder, 2007, p. 171). My aim is to focus the discussion on individual-society debate over rational and non-rational individual, and universal rational law from humanist and poststructuralist perspectives. My aim is not to compare and contrast these two perspectives. I will engage in these discussions to clarify my position, which is closer to the poststructuralist paradigm, while exploring the concept of agency from different perspectives.

#### **2.1.1 The individual as Rational Agent**

In humanism, individual self has a “normative nature” (Davies, 1991, p. 45). This normative nature is related to being a part of a society. Societal norms have a restricting influence on the individual. According to Davies (1991, p. 42) an individual can be either a product of the society or can resist to the hegemonic or dominant discourse in the society and can earn a voice to speak up for oneself based on individual rationales. The author argues that “agency assumes an agonistic relationship between the self and the other and between the self and society” (Davies, 1991, p. 42). In other words, human agency and dominant discourse in the society has a conflictual and/or hierarchical relation.

Roth (2011, p. 274) argues that the Kantian concept of agency does actually not include a hierarchical, top-down style. The author states that it is about establishing links between the individual and society and upholding the moral law. In addition to that, the universal rational law is something to be developed within a progressive society by including the members of the society in the process and transferring the experience of producing/practicing the universal law to the next generations. That requires “the use of public reason” (Roth, 2011, p. 274). Therefore, this dualism is not based on a conflict but a rigorous process of finding a common sense/universal law.



Leff (2012), has a relatively more complex way of explaining individual-society dualism compared to Davies (1991). While discussing tradition, the author argues that there is a mutual influence over tradition between the rhetor (agent) and the society. In other words, there is an interdependency and a more dynamic relationship between the two instead of a rivalry or a polemical one. The author argues that tradition is continuously evolving and the rhetors (agent) are influential in this process but also the tradition has an influence on the agent regarding what is acceptable by the public. Therefore, “the orator (agent) must display individual virtuosity in presenting and representing the tradition while also affirming solidarity with the audience” (Leff, 2012, p. 223). However, in this point of view, the relation of individual and society is still based on a certain level of dualism as well as a possibility of potential dominance of a hegemonic discourse.

While analyzing the individual-society dualism in humanism, it is important to understand the characteristics of individual who is a part of this kind of complex environment. For an individual, it is necessary to become a rational thinker and carry the society forward by contributing to the universal rationale which the society is structured around. To follow a rational thought is central to be considered as agentic. Roth (2011, p. 259-260) states Kant’s three principles that constitute rational thought. Firstly, if an individual can make a reasonable decision, that means this endeavor requires the awareness and ability to choose the necessary and suitable means to achieve a goal (instrumental principle or hypothetical imperative). Second principle is the motivation or incentive to reach a goal (principle of prudence). Third principle is using the will in accordance with reason (not desires or impulses) for the common benefit and universal moral law (categorical imperative). The author argues that an individual is autonomous (has agency) based on whether she/he is taking necessary actions based on rational thought instead of impulses and also whether one is motivated by categorical imperative or not (Roth, 2011, p. 273). Therefore, it is the individual’s choice of actions that define how agentic and rational this individual is. When a person knows the means and the ways of how to achieve a goal and can choose the moral laws by resisting one’s own impulses, this choice makes a person a rational thinker. This individual is expected to have the necessary skills to live in and improve society.

Being an agentic and rational individual self is considered important in terms of being a part of society. This state of the individual is explained further by Moeller (2006, p. 523) as a combination of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Every individual should develop into a unique and better version of oneself so that one can be included in the society they live in

(Moeller, 2006, p. 522). In other words, an individual is exclusively unique and also is able to function and included in a society. The author describes this relationship as “a non-static concept, and as a built-in tension” (Moeller, 2006, p. 522). By benefiting from this type of dynamic tension, it is possible to build the individual and the character and the society. However, in today’s Western education, the meaning of this individuality and building this individuality through education (Bildung has its own way to address this issue) is reduced to the individual who can practically function in a neoliberal society, which I will touch upon later in “student agency” section of this chapter. Moeller (2006, p. 525) describes this type of education as “functional differentiation”, which is a self-elimination system of the ones who do not function properly in a society. Considering this type of conflict, it is important to understand the dynamics of and prevailing discourses in a society which influences the definition of universal rationale.

The rational individual should be aware of and informed by the universal rationality in the society. The roots of this rationality lie in the dominant discourse in society. People are socialized within the framework of society’s norms and values, or in other words, within the dominant discourse in the society. Roth (2011, p. 270) also argues that an individual should learn how to interact within the society so that this individual can contribute to the society and transform the culture. To a humanist, during this socialization process, this free choice is made by a rational individual. However, what is ignored here, is the elitist and normative nature of this choice-making process that is influenced by the dominant discourse (Davies, 1991, p. 44).

Socialization may occur within unbalanced power relations. Unlike Roth (2011), Devine and Irwin (2005) explain this aspect further. The authors argue that according to Kant, rational individual should put the interests of the society in front of self-interests because “universal principles should be adhered by everyone” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 324). These universal principles are not known to everyone in the society, especially to the children. Therefore, until a person becomes a rational being, it is justifiable to teach her/him how to become rational. In that sense, the universal moral law can be influenced by the “rational”, or the powerful, which is simply another way of being political within the society by defining what is rational and what is irrational (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 325)

Agency can be fostered if the integration of the individual to the society is successful. Therefore, it is important to ponder over a question at this point; who is rational or who is not ra-

tional? Considering the socialization mentioned above, if an individual can become a rational thinker, s/he is considered as an agentic who can function in a society. On the other hand, if a person does not have these skills to be considered a rational person, or in other words if a person is a heteronomous person, he/she is described as a person who “is affected by others or by impulses of themselves” (Roth, 2011, p. 265). They cannot build and explain a rational argument (goals, means, principles) to defend their course of actions. That affects communication in the society negatively. Thus, a heteronomous person is not fit in the social coherence.

The next question to be explained is about the process of how “to become human”. One of the reasons why this is a problematic discussion in humanism is that it is about creating a prevalent discourse that is able to define individuals and the society (Davies, 1991, p. 51). If this discourse should be based on the universal rationale of how to become a human, there are some other questions to be asked such as; who produces this rational discourse or how are individuals influenced by this discourse. Davies (1991, p. 51) argues that in humanism, there is a hegemonic discourse within which structures the individual, even if this discourse is not the truth for this individual. Therefore, “the rational control the irrational and emotional” for the sake of the universal rationality (Davies, 1991, p. 44). That means the humanity of a person is measured based on certain criteria, which requires people to sacrifice or negotiate their uniqueness as a human. (Tarc, 2005, p. 836)

Roth (2011, p. 263) addresses this problem from another perspective by referring to the concept of conscience, or “the process of moral reflection” with others or by oneself. To explain briefly, while an individual, as a rational being, interacts in society in accordance with universal moral law, it is important to constitute a self-check-and-balance mechanism by reflecting upon one’s interactions and comparing them to the categorical imperative. Conscience is a must to “fulfil our duties” (Roth, 2011, p. 264). If a person can relate to the universal law through this reflection process and regulate his/her behavior and conducts social interactions accordingly, one will conclude that the trade-off which one does is a worthy sacrifice. Also, to choose to follow this path as a free person and as a rational thinker is a way of becoming a better person.

While discussing individual-society dualism, it is worth noting that there are some other dimensions that can help to discuss this relationship in a broader perspective. Hitlin and Elder (2007) mention that it is not useful to explain the individual-society relationship based on a strict dualism. According to the authors “agentic behavior is influenced by the requirements

of the interaction; as actors become more or less concerned with the immediate moment versus long-term life goals, they employ different social psychological processes and exhibit different forms of agency” (Hitlin & Elder, 2007, p. 171). They explain agency in four categories with regards to the wide range of possible instruments (as in Kant’s instrumental principle) to be used, freedom to choose, incentives, desires, identity, and short-term and long-term goals in addition to the evolution of the individual self throughout these processes of becoming a human. Therefore, it is not a simple discussion based on individual-society dualism considering the complexities of both sides of this duality such as ununifiable dimensions of each individual and complex effects of the society-individual relationship.

### 2.1.2 The Individual as Non-rational Agent

Poststructuralism and humanism differ in their perspectives on the concept of agency. To a poststructuralist, an individual is continuously in the process of constructing a self (Davies, 1991, p. 49). There is not a phase that an individual reaches a level of completing the process of being a human. Devine and Irwin (2005, p. 327) point out the fluidity of the process of becoming a human. Since the complex relationship between, individual, society, discourses, desires, time, long-term and short-term goals (Hitlin & Elder, 2007) has unpredictable influences on the individual, a human lives in “a nomadic rather than in a static frame” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 327). For that reason, becoming a human is a process that is always in progress.

There are various discourses that one may encounter in a society. It is natural to interact with these various discourses during the continuous process of constructing the individual self. Even if these various discourses (possibly) contradict each other, interacting with them is a part of this process (Davies, 1991, p. 46). Therefore, the self does not have to be the product of one hegemonic discourse (universal law) based on rational thought. A poststructuralist considers that it is important to be open to possibilities instead of complying with one hegemonic discourse (Tarc, 2005, p. 836). This interaction is considered as an emancipatory practice.

This emancipatory practice can be experienced in many different ways. For instance, Socratic dialogue can be a tool to create and interact with various discourses. The dialogue requires individuals to critically question and acquire knowledge by challenging each other (Bai, 2006, p. 12). Through the dialogue, individuals build their ‘worlds’. Bai (2006, p. 10-11) mentions

two concepts of this approach; world-making and world travelling. World-making is described as producing concepts and understandings related to meaning construction. World-travelling is described as discovering other concepts and the perceptions of other individuals by interacting with each other and understanding their experiences of meaning construction. As a result of this dialogical interaction, there is a possibility of “ontological shape-shifting” (Bai, 2006, p.5) In that sense, the subject constructs the self and evolves throughout these challenges.

The poststructuralist position is about subjectivity rather than rationality or objectivity. A poststructuralist does not accept that there can be a “fixed notion of human subjectivity” as in humanism (Tarc, 2005, p. 835). Because, if there is an assumption of a stable concept of human subjectivity, it is possible to categorize people as the ones who are “human” and the ones who are not. That engenders restraining political positionings of the subject (Tarc, 2005, p. 835; Kapoor, 2004). On the other hand, critics of a stable notion of subject have two problems in their critique. One of them is that they assume that there is a definable subject and the other one is replacing it with an emancipated subject (Tarc, 2005, p. 835). In the latter case, the definition of subject which is to be replaced with the previous one needs to be defined as well. In that context, subjectivity becomes a concept to be analyzed thoroughly.

The analysis of the subject requires awareness and reflexivity throughout this practice. According to Tarc (2005, p. 839), Derrida argues that deconstruction is not about eradicating a concept and replacing it with another, but it is about analyzing all pieces and background of the concept in question. Tarc (2005, p. 838) states that deconstruction is not an attack from outside but “it is elemental within the language” and practiced naturally as a part of the critiquing process. It is a way to understand, interact, and change the environment, and discourses around us. With this aim in mind, deconstructing subjectivity is an attempt to question and to listen. While deconstructing subjectivity, asking “who” is an important endeavor (Tarc, 2005, p. 836). “Embracing the humanity of the other” unconditionally should be the focus as an attempt to understand the subjectivity of the other (Tarc, 2005, p. 836). Because, as well as asking the question “who”, other issues such as who is asking this question, who is answering the “who” question, whose voice is heard in the answer (whether it is the listener’s perception or the speaker’s voice) are of utmost importance to be able to deconstruct the subject. (Tarc, 2005, p. 836; Kapoor, 2004). That facilitates the world-making and world-traveling processes.

While discussing about deconstructing the subject, another important point to be considered is the context. Derrida argues that “there can be no acontextual definition of human being” (as cited in Tarc, 2005, p. 834). Going along with Derrida, Davies (1991, p. 46) argues that we are surrounded by various discourses and interacting with them is a part of the process of becoming human. Throughout these interactions within the context, an individual can “resist, subvert and change these discourses” (Davies, 1991, p. 51). Therefore, being active and interactive with(in) these discourses is central to the concept of agency. All in all, it is not possible for individual to be completely free from a context but the way of how to interact with the discourse can be influenced by the agent.

Another important aspect of subjectivity and discourse discussion is who influences the discourse and to what extent. That introduces us the discourse-subjectivity-power “triumvirate” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 328). Power has the capacity to create the discourse, possibly with a goal to shape the subject(s). However, the subject with agency also has the capacity to be aware of this relationship and can influence the way it is constructed (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 328). Governmentality can be used as a concept to put this discussion into a more concrete context.

After mentioning Foucault’s (1991, p.102) “governmentality” as the influence of the power on individual, Devine and Irwin (2005, p. 325-326) state that there are two tools to be used to be able to escape from or deal with governmentality. First, non-rationality, or in other words, leaving the norms around us and start thinking, discovering and being open to possibilities without the borders of universal rational thought and second, not to be disconnected from the reality by trying to be acontextual but to have “a space to think, accept, modify, alienate or find alternatives to the prevailing paradigm” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 327).

An individual who can escape from governmentality fits into the definition of a heteronomic person in humanism. According to the poststructuralist perspective, the definition of heteronomic person in humanism is, actually, a person in-construction, not a person to be corrected (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 325). Therefore, heteronomy actually means to be agentic since a heteronomic person is someone with potential to influence, who is open to possibilities, can act as an agent of change and can act without the limitations of universal rationality. On the other hand, a rational individual is not autonomous and free not only in relation to universal rationality but also since this individual has to choose from limited options presented by the

prevailing discourse. Therefore, as Davies (1991, p. 51) argues, “poststructuralist theory turns the equation between rationality and agency on its head”.

Ferguson’s (2005) “decomposing modernity” can be shown as an example to governmentality power-discourse-subjectivity discussion. The author discusses the developmentalist narrative that leads to modernism. Ferguson (2005) states that developmentalist approach to the concept of modernism is as problematic as making the definition of the concept of modernism itself. This results from, firstly, who defines “modern” and its criteria and how it is defined as a superior status and “tradition” as an inferior status, or as lower-class or not-developed-yet society. Besides, secondly, disagreeing with the discourse of modernity, the author points out that the developmentalist discourse assumes that development has a sequential nature. Based on these two justifications, it is possible for the “modern” nations to show the ways of how to become “developed” in a series of sequential steps and helping the “traditional” societies for their betterment to become as “modern” by following these steps. Even though development is perceived as a positive word, it is problematic within the power-discourse-subjectivity discussion in terms of the discourse which is built around it, how it has been built, who builds it and who gets affected by it. By giving this example, my aim is to point out to this relation as an example of the concept of governmentality. Labeling a person or a group of people can lead to unequal power relations and have political results. Even though subject is influenced by the power, its agency should also be noted and acknowledged.

The discussion that I have tried to present so far has some common elements with the governmentality issue in education. Tarc (2005, p.836) formularizes this better as a question; “who are (are not) the human subjects I encounter (in education)”. How to approach and how to design education systems with a purpose in mind has been a central question not only in the field of education but also for policymakers. Since educational institutions are spaces which have direct influences on individuals who are/will be part of a society, understanding the concept of agency and the management structure of educational institutions challenges us to deconstruct and analyze who is the student in school and as well as what kind of contexts the schools are for students. I argue that the influential neoliberal education concept needs to be addressed by an anomaly within the system to deconstruct the current concept of education in Western democracies. Since the liberal education is compromised by the neoliberal doctrines, as I argue in chapter 2.2, this is an inevitable endeavor to face with to be able to create a relatively more democratic education.

## 2.2 Student Agency

In this chapter, I will first discuss the effects of neoliberalism on education. Human capital theory and social capital theory are presented briefly as theories that the neoliberal education paradigm is based on. Then, I argue that student agency is problematic in this paradigm. Finally, I will discuss student agency as political power in learning processes and living in schools.

### 2.2.1 Influences of Neoliberal Theories on Education

My aim in this section is to discuss the claim that I have made at the end of the previous section; to point out the influences of some theories from neoliberal paradigm on the current concept of education in Western democracies. These theories are human capital theory and social capital theory. These theories are still influential to explain and make policies on education. I will also mention the United Nation's sustainable development goal number four as an example in relation to the governmentality issue. I expect these discussions to present an opportunity to discuss student agency and the current concept of education in Western democracies.

Neoliberal theories become visible in the form of governmentality in Western education systems. The goal is to have autonomous individuals who can function in a liberal democratic society (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 318). This includes social, political and economic aspects of education as well (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 1). The end-goal of neoliberal education, schooling practices, teachings, and content is to create individuals who can contribute to the society, democracy and economy (Gandin & Apple, 2002, p. 260). This individual learns how to socialize in a democratic society and how to deploy the necessary skills for job-market. As a result, the content that is taught and learned at schools has an impact on access to economic resources as well as social resources (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 10-12). Therefore, the aim of the neoliberal education paradigm is to graduate students who will have access to higher economic income and wider social resources. The question for education systems at this point is about which one has priority in defining education; the market-relevant skills and market values, or the democracy, democratic culture, and democratic competences.

Human capital theory, as an influential theory in the field of education, suggests that the investment of the government in education returns in the form of the quality individual who can



contribute to the society and, individual and public economic growth (Sweetland, 1996, p. 341-342). Besides physical capital and financial capital, which are to be used in production, human capital represents the skills and qualifications of persons (Coleman, 1988, p. 118). That makes the endeavor of teaching relevant skills an important element for improving the production capacity of a country (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008, p. 479). After admitting that educators do not see economic growth as the goal of education, Sweetland (1996, p. 356), interestingly, points out that public opinion can hold educators accountable for economic growth based on widely accepted public discourse around the values of human capital theory.

Social capital theory has a complementary role for human capital theory (Coleman, 1988, p. 118) because human capital theory focuses on rates of return and relevant skills rather than social relationships of humans within this economic environment. However, Coleman (1988) argues that non-economic actions and relations can also have an impact on economy. Social capital is about explaining the effects of “relations among persons”, which are “less tangible”, on economy (Coleman, 1988, p. 100). There are two elements to explain this “less tangible” relation; “social structures, and the actions of actors within these social structures” (Coleman, 1998, p. 98). The norms and the quality of the interactions within the structures is some sort of bond that holds these relations together and the actors benefit from these interactions (Coleman, 1998, p. 98-100). For that reason, social capital is complementary to human capital because the relationships in a group, in a family, in a community is influential in the production and quality of human capital (Coleman, 1998, p. 109-115). From that perspective, it is attractive for governments to make policies regarding the family, society, and education, keeping the rates of return in mind.

However, these two influential theories have received a lot of criticism. As an example, Gilles (2017, p. 3) states that human capital theory reduces two concepts, human and education, to the level of mere instruments that are to be used to enhance economic growth. According to the author, for a government, the status of the education system is an investment for economic growth and the humanity aspect of education is ignored, as the name of the theory suggests human beings as “capital”.

The social capital theory aims to explain how the relations of persons contribute to the economy. However, the nature of these relationships can be complicated and difficult to explain. Sobel (2002) draws attention to the complexity of the context of these relationships regarding issues such as one’s access to these relationships, how these relations are developed in net-

works, what their values are and how these values are produced, and what the effect of these shared values on individuals are. Similarly, Durlauf (1999, p. 2) argues that some aspects of the concept of social capital should be approached cautiously. One of these aspects is that the values that build up the social capital can be positive or negative. The other one is that social capital influences not only intragroup relationships but also intergroup relationships as well. As an example to these two aspects of social capital, the author mentions a shopkeeper, who hires a socially segregated worker, might suffer from social pressure based on the ill norms within the group in which shopkeeper lives. Therefore, for the shopkeeper, it is a challenge to decide between doing the right thing or abiding by the norms of the social group which leads to racism and/or potential interracial struggles. Here, creating social capital based on stereotypical thinking and group-based thinking can engender negative consequences. In addition to that, the author also underlines that intergroup cooperation might have the potential to increase social capital. The author concludes that the context in the creation of social capital is fairly complicated and inter- and intra-group relationships need to be researched and discussed more in terms of their effects, definition, and influences on decision-making. Therefore, creating social capital can become highly value-laden and political.

Creating social capital in school, influenced by neoliberal values, can be highly problematic. Coleman (1988, p. 101) argues that there are three forms of social capital; firstly, obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures, secondly information channels, and finally, norms and effective sanctions. One of the results that Anderson (2007, p. 448) draws from his study on social capital is that “top-down hierarchical school leadership” (shaped by financial concerns such as the funding they will receive according to the test results) damages the relationships and trust between teachers and principal, hence reduces social capital in schools. That has a domino effect on teacher performance and student learning. Another result of this study is that more social capital associated with more learning. That encourages educators to think about social capital, its nature, and the values that affect educational habitat in a school.

This widely accepted approach to education, influenced by a neoliberal paradigm, shapes the international discourse as well. Brissett and Mitter (2017) question whether the discourse in Sustainable Development Goal number four (SDG 4) is a utilitarian one or a transformative one. A utilitarian approach designs education around neoliberal market values. In this context, students should be equipped with the relevant skills that can help them to navigate their way within the local and/or global job market. The curriculum, pedagogy, and schooling are designed within this perspective. On the other hand, the transformative approach understands

education as a platform that “social and individual changes” occur (Brisset & Mitter, 2017, p. 185). According to this perspective, while defining education, schooling, pedagogy, and curriculum, the aim of education should be considered according to whether the focus is on social and individual change. For governments which follow their commitments to SDG 4, education becomes an investment. Brisset and Mitter (2017, p. 185) argue that “human capital theory and utilitarian approaches to education share very similar DNA” as they have economic growth as their target.

Brissett and Mitter’s (2017) argument represents a similar situation to Ferguson’s (2005) article, “decomposing modernity”, which has been presented in chapter 2.1.2. Education is an influential tool for social change, however, this ‘change for the better’ is defined within the neoliberal model of development for conventional schooling. This discourse creates a “global social status quo of inequity” (Brisset & Mitter, 2017, p. 201). Whether the states are aware of it or not, they go under a commitment to achieve these goals within this neoliberal education paradigm. Therefore, aiming for ‘quality education’ becomes the new ‘modern’ and the individual is influenced and defined within this paradigm.

In education systems, dominated by neoliberal discourse in liberal democracies, tend to have a teach-to-the-test mindset, top-down hierarchical management, acquiring market-relevant skills. The neoliberal education paradigm also perceives the students as potential contributors to economic growth and socially capable individuals who can create ties to nurture economy and economical networks. In other words, this kind of perspective leads to market-oriented life style.

Gershon (2011, p. 539) summarizes better what I have been trying to capture. Within the neoliberal paradigm, the individual perceives the self as a “business project”. The market-relevant skills should be acquired to become autonomous individual to function in market. The neoliberal perspective reduces the individual to a “business project”. There are also other people and institutions with the same mindset and this creates a habitat for the neoliberal individual. The central concept that defines these relationships is the market. Education, as an institution structured around curriculum, pedagogy etc. is not an exception to this paradigm and is vulnerable to neoliberal influence. In other words, I argue that humanist approach to schooling is heavily influenced by neoliberal agenda which is based on the market-oriented skills and progressive, developmentalist paradigm. Universal rationality has been re-defined as market rationality under the neoliberal paradigm.

Governmentality finds its context within the neoliberal paradigm and has a significant impact on how an individual is socially constructed. Neoliberal doctrines have turned into a local and/or global discourse that affects how education is perceived. In other words, inspired by Foucault's terms, it is possible to argue that, market rationality becomes necessary for the "common good" and the states govern the countries and structure education based on this rationality (Foucault, 1991, p. 95). This influence can also go beyond the borders and influence education policies of other countries as well. For instance, SDG 4 targets are not advised to be used as a parallel education agenda of the countries, but they are expected to be integrated with the current education policies of the countries (UNESCO, 2016, p. 19). In that case, education and education systems become vulnerable to the influence of whoever decides or has more influence on global market values (Brisset & Mitter, 2017, p. 201).

My research question becomes relatively more apparent at this point; as Sweetland touched upon, when the market experiences problems, people blame education but is it education's responsibility to train people for the job market? How do students get influenced by a neoliberal paradigm? Do students have freedom and agency on what to learn or what not to learn or how to live at schools where they spend a considerable amount of their lives? How does that affect democracy and democratic culture? Do the neoliberal individual and democratic individual who are educated in schools have some elements in common or have differences more?

I argue that the content, the practices, and the mindsets of education systems differ based on whether their end-goal is to have a "neoliberal individual" or "democratic individual". In addition to that, the individual's agentic capacity is also shaped based on these categories. Neoliberal individual's agency is accepted and cherished as long as the individual complies with market values and becomes a part of the local/global market mechanism. On the other hand, democratic individual's agency is perceived as an anomaly or interruption to this market mechanism. However, democratic individual has more agentic capacity to influence various aspects of life such as market, society, politics, and, most importantly to my topic, education.

### 2.2.2 Problematizing Student Agency in Institutionalized Schooling

I intend to point out the problem of student agency in institutionalized neoliberal schooling in relation to two elements; pedagogy and the context in which this pedagogy is created since pedagogy is a decisive factor on how to structure education. In the previous chapter, I pointed out the characteristics of governmentality in the context of neoliberal paradigm and some of

its foundational theories. Now, I will discuss how governmentality in the neoliberal education paradigm influences pedagogy and I will problematize the student agency within this pedagogical perspective.

What kind of discourse(s) students interact with in schools is important to understand the foundations of pedagogy and education. What is to be taught and learned should be critically analyzed and should not be taken for granted (Bai, 2006, p. 12). Today, it is explicitly articulated that school is a place where students learn the market-relevant skills and it is a norm to send the children to school or, for students, to go to school to “learn” (Bai, 2006, p.12). Besides its function to be in the service of economy, school can be used as the vessel for delivering ideologies as well (Giroux, 1988, p. 68). Regardless of what influences pedagogy, be it economy or ideology or both or something else, the pedagogy that is designed to achieve these goals has to engage in some sort of conversation with the student to deliver whatever is intended. That brings us to the question of how student is defined. To make the problem more apparent, it is possible to ask these questions; who is student or, can student be defined as a fixed notion or not?

Tarc (2005, p. 834) argues that in Western type of education concept, there is a fixed notion of student and “many educational practices, cognitive and social theories, curricula and pedagogies depend” on this definition. The need for this kind of definition of student in neoliberal paradigm is about the making people autonomous within the marketplace so that they can pursue a prosperous life when they start the ‘real life’ after school as well as indoctrinating the state’s official ideology (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012, p. 163; Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 329). Similarly, Gershon (2011, p. 539-540) argues that neoliberal agent should have skills and connections to be able to access to the market and other people, who can share and operate with the same values. Therefore, in this context, student agency is set to be in accordance with needs of the workforce. The degree of the intensity of this claim depends on how much intervention by the state takes place to achieve neoliberal goals in education.

In this context, students have a certain degree of freedom as long as they meet the curriculum requirement to be able to graduate. Therefore, in classroom level, if pedagogical authority of the teacher is absolute and unquestionable, student agency becomes very problematic because how and what to learn is decided by the teacher (or educators), not by the student (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2019, p. 1). At the system level, the problem with this approach is that since the government perceives education something to be invested, there must be accounta-

bility to the public about the return of this investment following tangible proof or statistics. That limits the pedagogical diversity and the space for educators to interact with students in a more creative and critical manner and of course student agency, which can be defined and influenced within a set of restricted bureaucratic preset procedures (Davis, 2003, p. 2; Ricci, 2004, p. 342).

The level of student agency is related to how the school is defined and structured as an institution. Classroom, subjects, lessons, the roles of the persons in school are the components and tools of neoliberal education paradigm to achieve to optimize the effectiveness of the education system. Contrary to the neoliberal education paradigm, in a democratic education paradigm, students' involvement in all aspects of education is as important as the other parties' involvement, such as teachers, principals, parents, and policymakers. This is a criterion of who has how much power in education, hence who has more agency. In the following chapter, I will discuss student agency further.

### 2.2.3 Student Agency in Learning and Education

In this section, I will discuss student agency in relation to, firstly, students' involvement in decision-making in learning and, then, students' involvement in living as members of the community at school. My aim is to analyze the levels of political power that students have in schooling.

The degree of students' involvement in learning depends on the space that they have to make an impact on learning processes. Matusov, von Duyke and Kayumova (2016, p. 425) categorize the different approaches to student agency in terms of "the difference between being a subject and an object of education". For that reason, their analysis is based on "the criterion on who owns and determines the endpoints of learning in the different educational contexts" (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 425). They argue that there are (but not necessarily limited to) four categories of student agency in the literature; instrumental agency, effortful agency, dynamically emergent agency, and authorial agency. I will present these four categories briefly and discuss them further within the related literature further.

The first category is instrumental agency. The instrumental agency is discussed in the context of students' goals and preset curriculum. Similar to Kant's universal rationalism, the student follows the teacher's presentation of the curriculum to be able to reach a predefined level of

mastery for the necessary skills. The problem here is the lack of compatibility between student's goals, needs and desires about what to learn, and what is considered as important to be taught by the authorities (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012, p. 159). For student, that results in a trade-off between what student wants to learn or is interested in learning and what is relevant (skills) to the so-called "real world". In this separation, student agency is limited by the predefined content of the curriculum. Student does not have a say in deciding the endpoints of learning. This leads to a "compartmentalization of a person's goals, desires, and motives in separation from the notion of agency in education because what defines what is a tool and what is knowledge is mediation of the person's goal" (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 427).

Secondly, the effortful agency has three aspects; motivation, how to protect motivation in the face of some internal and external adversaries, and the focus on people's commitment to their actions (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 429-430). The learning contract is given as an example to explain this type of agency. A learning contract is signed between a student and a teacher that represents the motivation and the commitment of the student to the goals in the contract. The student acts and takes responsibility for her/his learning. However, the authors argue that this type of "mutual" arrangement implies that the student accepts to achieve the goals of the preset curriculum followed and implemented by the teacher. Even though the student is motivated, this motivation is on the basis of learning what the experts want her/him to learn.

Thirdly, the dynamically emergent agency is defined within the context of a complex learning environment. The authors explain this type of agency as student's efforts to meet the demands of the learning context which is created by the educator. Students are expected to develop competences within this context. Choosing learning steps within a computer program can be an example of this category. "Differences in context place different demands on participants, which in turn demands and develops different competences" (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 433). The authors criticize this view because of, firstly, its emphasis on the context rather than the agent using its agency, secondly, the lack of "dialogic quality and agent's responsibility for its own creativity", and, thirdly, the existence of a "hidden observer" of this process who can influence or change the context that student interacts with (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 433).

It was necessary for me to mention these three categories to show what I exclude to define student agency. For that reason, before going on to the fourth category, I want to point out an issue regarding these three categories in terms of Matusov et al's (2016) criterion. Equipping students with certain skills (instrumental agency), manipulating student's will (effortful agency), or manipulating the learning context (dynamically emergent agency) have some limitations in terms of student agency. It can lead to shape students under a prevailing discourse as well as to lead them to become non-critical. As a result, the education system makes students acquire a "dispassionate and decontextualized toolkit of essential knowledge and skills" or indoctrination. (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012, p. 160; Giroux, 1988, p. 68). In that case, the concept of agency is restricted and more vulnerable to be perceived and defined as a fixed concept. However, student agency is a complicated concept. The educational context, teacher-student interactions, and how these interactions evolve over time are important dimensions to be considered and analyzed to understand student agency (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

Finally, the fourth category is the authorial agency. This category "focuses on the production of culture"; not on "enculturation" (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 434). Matusov et al. (2016, p. 434) describe this type of agency as practiced "through socially recognized personal transcendence of the given". In addition to that, "the notion of authorial agency is contested, evaluative, discursive, dialogic, and ethical" (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 434). That provides a space for the students to be creative and take responsibility for their learning.

Matusov and colleagues (2016, p. 435) argue that "authorial agency addresses two dichotomies; the given vs the innovative and individual vs the social". About the given vs the innovative dichotomy, the agent uses the given as the raw material to make anew. Here, the agency is contextual however there is a struggle for transcendence by using the given. About the individual vs the social dichotomy, the authors argue that the "transcendence has to be recognized by the relevant others and/or by the self. This recognition calls for dialogicity and responsibility" (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 435). The authors also argue that, in education, addressing these two dichotomies is not about educating the student by reproducing the given but it is about being open to a responsible dialogue between the student's and the educator's learning experiences (the given) so that the student can author her/his unknown future. Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2012) offer critical dialogue approach to education to provide a space for the student to critically engage in dialogue with herself/himself, other learners, educators, society to test cultural values as well as the value of education.



Conventional (neoliberal) schooling strictly limits student agency by asking the student to meet the demands of the teacher and the curriculum instead of providing opportunities for student authorship (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 437). Agreeing with Matusov et al., Lobok (2012a) also argues that conventional schooling ignores the agency of the student by presenting the same curriculum for every student. According to Lobok (2012a, p.7), education and knowledge cannot be restricted to a one-size-fit-all curriculum prepared by experts for students. Instead, preparing an educational space for students which helps them to interact with and contribute to various discourses of “human culture” should be the goal of education (Lobok 2012a, p. 7).

Lobok (2012b) argues that there should be a change in the schooling paradigm. According to the author (2012b, p. 72), schools should consider three issues while addressing this change; “agency, dialogue (communication), and development”. In terms of agency, the author argues that the relationship between human and knowledge should not be intervened by preset curriculum but, instead, (student’s) thinking should be the tool to personalize this relationship (Lobok, 2012b, p. 73). The characteristics of this relationship is explained by Lobok as “the ability to generate new knowledge is the ability to work with inconsistencies” (Lobok, 2012b, p. 73). On the other hand, if this tool of creating new knowledge and opportunity of thinking is taken away from the student, the definition of the learning turns into repeating the curriculum (Lobok, 2012b, p. 77-78). Considering Matusov et al.’s (2016, p. 425) criterion, that means the endpoint of learning is not decided by the student. In the latter case, the questions are not student’s questions but the preset questions in the curriculum and the answers are not student’s answers but the correct answers according to the curriculum.

In Freire’s pedagogy, this problem of following a preset curriculum is called as banking type of education (Zygmantas, 2009, p. 70). The construction of knowledge in this context is weak because student is expected to receive what is presented in the curriculum without critically engaging in a dialogical interaction with the teacher or critically thinking about the presented knowledge (Zygmantas, 2009, p. 70). According to the author, this way of education positions the student in a passive situation who does not raise questions. As a result, education functions as a mechanism to control the students instead of an emancipatory process. It is not possible for education to start a change for people if the students cannot critically engage with what they learn in a dialogical manner.

Freirean pedagogy requires teachers to be in a role that supports students as the “co-authors” of the knowledge who “share responsibility...in creation and the re-invention their own world” (Zygmantas, 2009, p. 73). According to Giroux (1988, p. 75), in Freirean pedagogy, literacy skills that are learned at school are tools to critically analyze the construction of the world, culture, social practices and its power dynamics to be able to create a space which is open to (personal and societal) possibilities and, in the end, emancipation instead of indoctrination and domination of one universal discourse. The dominant discourse and prescribed education have an influence on student’s “world-making” (Bai, 2006, p. 10) process by defining which competences are relevant or which subjects are superior to other(s) (Giroux, 1988, p. 67). In that case, being the author of one’s own learning is limited, and the “world” is shaped by others but not so much by the student.

Instead of applying the teaching process on student in a hierarchic and developmentalist approach, Waghid et al. (2019) offer a Deleuzean and Guattarian approach to student agency in education processes. Deleuze and Guattari’s “rhizomatic education, through ‘starting anywhere’, looks for middles and disrupts the taken-for-granted understanding of linear education” (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2019, p. 2). Waghid et al. (2019, p. 90) state that, in this approach, learning takes place in a dialogical manner which students are not taught what is in the curriculum, but students and teachers are in process of “(re)constructing and deconstructing meanings” based on the interest, desires, and needs of the learner. There is not a beginning or ending in learning or a certain type of questions and answers based on a fixed curriculum. Students and teachers construct knowledge together in a rhizomatic fashion where they interact and make a connection within a multidimensional space and learning can take place in a more natural way (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2019, p. 2-3). In that approach, student is not an object which teaching is applied to but an active agent who has initiative to construct learning in relation not only with teachers but also with other students, community and the world. Given to its interactive and dialogical nature, the authors argue that there are possibilities for a more democratic education in this type of “rhizomatic” learning environment based on mutual responsibility, reflection and dialogue between student and teacher (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2019, p. 91). As in Matusov’s criterion for student agency, in this perspective, student is an active and unique subject and can determine the endpoints of learning.

The second aspect that students can practice political power, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, is related to living at school. Living and learning are two aspects of schooling, but they are not mutually exclusive. Social interactions take place within learning processes as

well as school as a social medium. Therefore, the concept of student agency cannot be restricted only in teaching-learning processes.

Education and social relations in schools cannot be reduced to applying the professionally prepared curriculum to students by experts. Education and school are also connected to society as well, and they cannot be reduced to a top-down hierarchical system (Gardner & Crockwell, 2006, p. 9-10). Gardner and Crockwell (2012) explain this relation further in two categories. First, “to view ‘education as a community issue’ (which) means to emphasize shared ownership and to acknowledge education within a broader and more inclusive/holistic/multi-perspective conceptual frame of the community” (Gardner & Crockwell, 2006, p. 13). Second, “‘community involvement in education’ is a more limited arrangement wherein an educational structure considers input from the community while maintaining its own ideological lens and structural and decision-making arrangement” (Gardner & Crockwell, 2006, p. 13). In other words, on one hand, the former view, education as a community issue, has a potential to apply “world-making and world-traveling (Bai, 2016, p. 10)” in a rhizomatic fashion (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2019, p. 91) by including the community to education because of its dialogical nature. Besides, every stakeholder, including students, can have a political stance in school. On the other hand, the latter view, community involvement in education, keeps the school more closed to dialogue, because in this view, school, as a part of a centralized education system, has the responsibility and rights to realize the official requirements for a “proper” education. In this situation, “the language of management” and “the language of democracy” collides, or, put differently, the hegemonic discourse that structures education and school corners the concept of “participative agency” (of every stakeholder in school) and the space for politics of schooling into a very limited space, if not eradicates them (Davis, 2003, p.2).

The relationship between the student and the educational setting is a context in which we can discuss the concept of agency. For instance, “community involvement in education” view, as mentioned above, means that the community approves and accepts the official pedagogy and ideology of the education system and supports the school (Gardner & Crockwell, 2006, p. 13). Therefore, the community does not attempt to establish a more dialogical conversation with all stakeholders (including students) in the school to create a more democratic and participative school culture. In other words, in “community involvement in education” view, the community becomes the object of governmentality under the ideological choice of the education

system (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 319). This kind of unilaterally structured hierarchical education systems are open to indoctrination.

The “community involvement in education” view may cause some inconsistencies. For example, making the “irrational (student)” rational to free the individual for life in today’s liberal democracy has a paradox because human beings are “already autonomous, rational beings” who are free to make choices (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 319). In that sense, it is possible to call this kind of educational context as the indoctrination of rationalism (Alexander, 2005, p. 2). Also, Alexander (2005, p. 2) argues that “rationalism is no less ideological than the political or religious doctrines fostered in schools”. When education is structured unilaterally, as described above, the official education ideology founds its legality to speak on behalf of the subaltern (student and/or the community).

On the other hand, “education as a community issue” view is a more open space to create a more democratic school culture and distance itself from an individual-structure dichotomy or strict hierarchical education system. For that, it is necessary for all stakeholders in education (including students) to think out of the limits of the universal rationale of the education system and to be more open to creating various other options. In addition to that, also the structure (education system) should be flexible and interactive for this creation process. As in Socrates’s dialogical approach, there should be a challenging, responsible and dialogical relationship of “world-making” and “world-traveling” for ever-evolving and dynamic creation of personalized knowledge and the concept of education (or as Bai calls it “ontological shape-shifting) rather than a static one (Bai, 2006, p.5). The question that can destabilize the thoughts of especially educators (who currently have more political power to define the concept of student agency in conventional schools) is Tarc’s (2005, p.836) question; “who are (are not) the human subjects I encounter (in education)?”

The content and quality of the interactions between students-educators-society define the nature of education and schooling. Therefore, creating heteronomy in conventional schooling through democratic interactions can be considered as a way to bring different people together for a genuine, responsible conversation for an inclusive democratic culture within current schooling practices. However, as long as these interactions are facilitated within and/or influenced by the neoliberal education paradigm, they will be restricted by the needs of the market and the hierarchy and bureaucracy in schooling and education.

Finally, making a unified definition of student agency as a concept, or “creating” an emancipated one (which is a paradox in itself) is a difficult and maybe unnecessary attempt since it can be exploited by the actors who define it (Tarc, 2005, p. 835). Instead of defining student agency as a concept, an alternative option is to focus on its attributes and/or the effects of democratic practices in schooling. These attributes and/or effects result from the political power of student’s agentic potential that can be observed when a student acts and takes a political stance in schooling and education. Using this political power in the educational contexts should be based on (and requires) ethics of education, mutual responsibility, mutual understanding or the “pedagogy of difference” (Alexander, 2005, p. 15). Considering how to manage the political space regarding all aspects of schooling through dialogue is a way to avoid understanding the school as a place where human beings are made according to a manual (curriculum) or a certain ideology. That also gives the subject a space for awareness and to create and realize various possibilities, not only for oneself but for everybody.

### **2.3 Student Agency, Critical Pedagogy and Democracy**

The relationship between critical pedagogy and democracy is an important discussion to analyze the concept of student agency. In a sense, it is possible to explain critical pedagogy via a one-word question to ask; Why? It naturally attracts other questions along the way of exploring the issues in education, such as Tarc’s (2005, p.836) question. However, critical pedagogy is not only about asking questions and being critical.

Critical pedagogy is about opening a space for discussion and questioning not only the education and schooling but also their elements and their relationships with other components of the social system, specifically their connection to democracy and democratic culture. Giroux (2007, p. 3) argues that “one of the pedagogy’s most fundamental goals is to teach students to believe that democracy is desirable and possible”. Then the author describes pedagogy as “the space that provides a moral and political referent for understanding how what we do in the classroom is linked wider social, political, and economic forces” (Giroux, 2007, p. 3) In that context, education cannot be considered as a space which is isolated from the “real world” or in other words, education is not a preparation for a phase that comes after school. Critical pedagogy suggests that education has a dynamic power to influence the world around us by taking a critical stance to face and question the discourses that create the “world”. To keep

this discussion focused, I would like to draw the attention to this educational space and its qualities in relation to democracy and discuss the role of the student within this context.

Democracy is not a concept that can be defined once and be practiced based on this definition continuously. Democracy is a concept to explain the nature of the relationship between the people who are governed and the people who govern. Accountability of the governors, elections, institutions of democracy, and the ways of how the power is mediated are common issues to be discussed in/about democracies (Schmitter & Karl, 1991, p. 115). The historical, social, economic background of a society shapes how democracy is practiced in a society (Schmitter & Karl, 1991, p. 114). These issues point out the dynamic nature of democracy and imply it is not a static concept.

Democracy requires participation from the level of one to one interactions of individuals to broader domains such as politics, economy, society, and media. Democracy requires agentic individuals who have competences for democratic culture to be active and autonomous in these domains. For that reason, to be able to analyze the concept of student agency, it is important to discuss the relationship of education and democracy and what influences this relationship. It is possible to ask these two questions to start a discussion about the relationship between education and democracy; can education cause “a new form of illiteracy” (Carr, 2011, p 191) and can democracy become authoritarian (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 22).

It is possible to discuss these two questions over the concept of neoliberal democracy. Neoliberal doctrine seeks for the implementation of market rationality and values not only in economy but also in other aspects of social life. Giroux and Giroux (2006, p. 21) argue that neoliberalism designs education as an institution which produces citizen who are “trained for service sector jobs and produce lifelong consumers”. To be able to reach that goal, authors continue, education systems are structured based on “a logic that has inspired bankrupt reform initiatives such as standardization, high-stakes testing, rigid accountability schemes, and privatization” (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 21). In such a setting, neoliberal thought influences pedagogy to be designed around market rationality rather than student (agency) being in the center of education. In other words, neoliberal education is systematized around the values of “neoliberal democracy” where students are not involved in critical discussions related to various aspects of school and life to be able to develop competences for democratic culture. As the answer to the first question (Carr, 2011, p. 191), this engenders “a new form of illiteracy” in which students are market literate but not democracy literate.

There is one common ground neoliberal education paradigm and critical pedagogy share. They both agree on this argument; education shapes the society (Giroux and Giroux, 2006, p. 28). On one hand, the neoliberal education paradigm causes manipulation of the student as an example of governmentality as explained previously. On the other hand, critical pedagogy creates a space that can help the student to be more critical and democratic through action and interaction in learning and school. Critical pedagogy aims to create a chance for emancipatory social change through democracy.

Considering the schools as places where culture is produced, how the elements of this culture production are coded becomes an important issue to discuss (Carr, 2011, p. 191). Neoliberal education paradigm prioritizes the market needs and ignores students' participation in education in democratic ways, as I argued earlier. Compared to neoliberal approach to education, for critical pedagogy, upholding the dynamic nature of democratic processes by practicing it in a dialectical, critical, respectful manner opens to a wider range of possibilities for creating democratic culture in schools. Therefore, the answer to the second question about whether democracy can become authoritarian is yes. If generalized solutions for education and standardized goals of education are preferred to the qualities of and competences for creating democratic culture at school, a democracy can become authoritarian, or at best, eroded under the neoliberal paradigm. (Carr, 2011, p. 191).

Education influences how the culture of a society is created. Therefore, the school needs to be platforms that are compatible with a democratic way of life. For that reason, it is possible to call the school as a "political project" to have democratic individuals in a society (Carr, 2011, p. 194). However, when we look at school rules issue in conventional (neoliberal) schooling, it is not possible to say that schools are places where students can participate in decision-making process democratically. Students are basically the objects of these rules and have less political power than educators (Thornberg, 2008, p. 54-55). It means that the socialization aspect of conventional schooling and social interactions within this context do not aim democracy. On the other hand, critical pedagogy embraces an approach that criticizes the student – teacher roles, which are inherited from banking model education, to be able to facilitate critical and democratic dialogue in schools (Baldissoni, 2010, p. 23). According to critical pedagogy, it is possible to think education as a space where different people interact to learn and live together and create within a democratic culture instead of a student-teacher dichotomy and hierarchy. "Hence, critical pedagogy can become the cornerstone of democracy in that

it provides the ‘very foundation for students to learn not merely how to be governed but also how to be capable of governing’” (Carr, 2011, p.193)

Critical pedagogy’s hope for social change for a better world starts at this point. A person (student or teacher) should be aware of the world and needs to learn how to read the world critically (Zygmantas, 2009, p. 66). In addition to that, a person (student or teacher) should also be aware of automaticity (Door, 2014, p. 93-94). Door defines automaticity as acting based on the roles and behaviors that are taken-for-granted (Door, 2014, p. 94). Therefore, it is important for “educators” to ask the question of “who is the student” (Tarc, 2005) as well as “who am I (am I not) and how am I acting and reacting in school? (Door, 2014, p. 89). That helps to stay away from automaticity and to stay critical continuously.

If critical pedagogy seeks for a social change and argues that education is the space where it starts, it is important to be reflexive for an individual to become an agent of change for democratic culture. Being responsible to each other requires this type of reflexivity. “The nature of schooling should be such that it gives individuals the capacity to construct a better world, and at the same time to reconstruct themselves” (Door, 2014, p. 90). Critical pedagogy also means to become engaged with and analyze the world as well as the self so that it becomes possible to understand these relations and regulate them accordingly (Door, 2014, p. 97).

The student agency can be visible in a medium where the characteristics of democracy are stronger. Carr (2011, p. 197-200) uses thin vs thick democracy analogy to explain these characteristics. Thin democracy is a sign of weak or no involvement of students to the issues that are related to their education. Students do as they are told and follow the education which is designed for them. Students do not have to be critical about any issues in school. Thick democracy requires students and educators who can question the practices, create alternatives not only in relation to the issues in school (including what is to be learned) but also the issues in wider social domains. According to this analogy, it is possible to argue that neoliberalism’s governmentality effect, which is based on market rationality, lessens when the focus of education shifts towards thicker democracy.

Democracy cannot be taught, it is to be practiced (Baldissoni, 2010, p. 25). When democracy is taught, or in other words, it is possible to call this process as democratization, it means that “schools and educational systems talk the talk of democracy, but, at best, they limp the walk” (Effrat & Schimmel, 2003, p4). On the other hand, “Its (critical pedagogy’s) innumerable variations reflect both a shared belief in education as a moral and political practice and a recogni-



tion that its value should be judged in terms of how it prepares students to engage in a common struggle for deepening the possibilities of autonomy, critical thought, and a substantive democracy” (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 21). Democracy in schools is a concept that is to be discussed constantly and to evolve within each school’s own context. From that point of view, in schools and education, questioning, even democracy itself, to gain insight and knowledge of democratic principles, values and processes is necessary so that all stakeholders, especially students, can have a genuine understanding and practical knowledge of what democracy means. Critical pedagogy can create this “anomaly” for the neoliberal education paradigm up to some extent by responding it with democratic principles and values within education systems.

Creating this democratic culture and practices in schools requires each student to construct and communicate their understandings of democracy with all stakeholders. Becoming only democracy literate is not sufficient at this point. In that sense, acquiring the necessary competences for democratic culture around curriculum and assessment, which are designed by educators for students, might have some limits. These limits arise from the power of decisions that educators make on behalf of students. Because this type of preset curriculum and assessment are not capable of communicating the democratic competences as something “good” since they are assumed as “good” for democracy by the educators. This type of acquisition of democratic competences can be defined as the democratization of students unless students are active in the creation of knowledge regarding the concept of democracy.

Students construction of the concept of democracy and communicating this concept with teachers is the foundation of learning democracy. Democratic values and practices should be questioned by the students and should be used as a medium of communication to discover the democratic experience. Socratic dialogue can help students to create a space for world-making and world-travelling to explore democracy (Bai, 2006, p. 12). Personalizing the relationship between democracy and education with an aim for students to contribute to human culture requires students’ active engagement (Lobok 2012a, p. 7). The focus of this endeavor changes from solving the problem of democracy defined by the adults towards students’ own definition of the problem of democracy out of students’ own curiosity. In that way, students challenge the problem of democracy that they constructed. That means the end goal of experiencing and learning democracy in school is decided by the students (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 425). Teachers’ position here is to be a qualified interlocutor who engages in conversation with student to understand how students approach the issues related to de-

mocracy within schools (von Glasersfeld, 1991, p. xvii). In that sense, democratic competences are not something to be learned but to be constructed out of students' "autonomous intellectual satisfaction" (von Glasersfeld, 1991, p. xviii) and understanding instead of "replication of a behavioral response" (von Glasersfeld, 1991, p. xix). "Fixed notion of student" (Tarc, 2005, p. 834) does not fit in this approach.

## **2.4 Research Questions**

The reference framework of competences for democratic culture (henceforward the framework) is in the center of the Council of Europe's "free to speak, safe to learn – Democratic schools for all" campaign. The framework aims to equip students with democratic competences which are to be deployed in culturally diverse complex social settings and help them acquire these competences by practicing them in schools. The users of the framework are expected to design education and schooling practices for students accordingly. The framework encourages a student-centered approach to education.

This study aims to analyze the concept of student agency in relation to democratic education settings as offered in the framework. I analyzed the framework by using thematic analysis. I developed four themes guiding my analysis in this study. These are democratic environment in schools, conventional approaches to schooling, teachers teaching the competences, and students as democratic agents.

I formulated my research questions as follows;

- How does the framework connect student agency and school context?
- How does the framework define student agency in relation to democratic culture in schools?

### **3 Methodology**

The reference framework of competences for democratic culture is a document, published for the member states of the Council of Europe, that emphasizes the importance of promoting democratic culture in schools. The campaign is planned for 4 years, between 2018 and 2022. However, it is aimed to improve the framework and the campaign during and after its implementation. The volunteer schools which participate in this campaign share their experiences of the framework. This study focuses on the concept of student agency and its position while facilitating and promoting democratic culture in schools. I chose thematic analysis as my method to find the patterns and create the themes to answer my research questions.

#### **3.1 Data**

The reference framework of competences for democratic culture consists of three volumes. The first volume explains the details of the context, concepts and model. The second volume presents the descriptors of competences for democratic culture. The third volume is the guidance for implementation. Even though I read the second volume carefully, I did not include it in my analysis. The reason is that my focus is not to analyze the content of the descriptors of competences. My focus is on a specific aspect of the framework, which is student agency. Volume one and volume three have rich data to be analyzed about how student agency relates to democratic practices in schools and how it is influenced by education as suggested in the framework.

#### **3.2 Thematic analysis**

I adapted Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach in this thesis. Thematic analysis is a method to find the patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013b, p. 2). Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78) argue that thematic analysis is a flexible method. The reason for this is that it is a six-step method which "does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks" as in discourse analysis, narrative analysis, or interpretative phenomenological analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 175). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to approach the data inductively and/or deductively. It can be used for a descriptive or a critical analysis. It is possible to use thematic analysis with almost any type of data.

The position of the researcher is active rather than passive. That means the researcher does not wait for the themes to emerge from the data. Rather, the researcher develops the themes. The authors use the sculptor and archeologist metaphors to explain the position of the researcher further. An archeologist discovers the cities emerge from the ground however, a sculptor uses the material such as wood or marble to produce a piece of art. This sculpture is still a piece of marble but shaped with art, therefore it has artistic value (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 208). It is researcher's responsibility to decide which theoretical framework works with thematic analysis for the data in question by staying loyal to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). Hence, the research depends on the researcher's "analytic sensibility" (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 202). There are decisions to be made while conducting thematic analysis regarding the design of the study. My aim, here, is to present the steps that I followed throughout the analysis as well as the other possible options that I did not choose to follow.

The first step for thematic analysis is to get familiar with the data. This process might include transcription of the data and/or reading the data several times to discover various aspects of it (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Since the data that I study is a published document, I read the framework twice to get familiar with it. During this process, I took some notes and realized some patterns related to my research question. These notes helped me to organize my thoughts on the data.

After getting familiar with the framework, I started coding phase. In thematic analysis, it is possible to start developing codes in two ways (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 206-210). The first one is selective coding which means selecting out the parts that are relevant to the research interest and create a data corpus for the analysis. This type of coding is used as a data-reduction technique. Even though this type of data-reduction includes some sort of analysis element through theoretical lenses, it is considered as a preparation phase for the real analysis. The analysis starts after compiling the data corpus. The other way is complete coding which means the researcher codes everything that is relevant to the research question. That means the researcher starts analysis over the entire data set, not only a part of it, by developing the codes. I chose the second option and coded everything that I thought it was relevant to my research question. My aim was not a full description of the framework. Instead, I looked for the data that was relevant for answering my research question, considering the vastness of the data.

The characteristics of the codes is another issue to be considered about coding. While coding, it is important to choose whether to focus on semantic meaning or latent meaning in the data. Semantic codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 208) are developed based on the surface meaning in the data. On the other hand, latent codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 207) are developed and influenced by the researcher's interpretation of what is read in the data based on the theoretical background knowledge of the researcher. That means the researcher perceives what is in the data through her/his theoretical lenses. I decided to choose semantic coding because my aim was to understand the concept of student agency and the context that influences this concept as it is described in the framework. After I completed the coding phase, I checked the data extracts to each code to see whether codes can capture the meaning of the data extracts in their own context.

Next, I have looked for patterns across the codes that I have developed. The patterns that I have found helped me to develop "candidate themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 224). After I developed these candidate themes I checked whether they are meaningful in relation to the research question and whether they are coherent together to answer the research question. (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 233).

When I completed developing candidate themes, I started checking the quality of the themes. Braun and Clarke criterion for this stage is "internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). In other words, the researcher needs to check whether the data that structures the theme are coherent and meaningful in itself while it is also explicitly different from the other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). For that reason, first, I checked the data extracts that formed the codes. Then I checked if they make sense within the data that they are used. To do that, I check the themes whether they are meaningful when compared to the framework.

The fifth step is defining and naming themes. This step is important to prepare the themes for the analysis. It is important to check the themes and the data once more and see if they really constitute a narrative together about the data. Defining these themes with a few sentences is helpful in this step. It also helps the researcher to see how themes explain the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

The final step is about presenting the researcher's analysis based on the evidence from the data. It is important to communicate the analysis for each theme by presenting data extracts along with the researcher's analysis and "argument in relation to the research question"

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). My analysis is descriptive one, not an interpretative one. For that reason, I structured my analysis around descriptions of the data extracts for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 254). Even though the themes are not hierarchical but lateral, I presented the themes in an order to create a coherent whole to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, p. 227).

## **4 Findings**

### **4.1 Democratic Environment in School**

This theme captures the elements of the school context that are pointed out in the framework to foster learners' competences which are to be deployed in democratic and intercultural contexts. The framework aims to create a space for education to “empower learners as autonomous social agents” (Volume 1, p. 65) as well as individuals who can address the requirements of the market (Volume 3, p. 19). To achieve this purpose, the framework puts an emphasis on teachers' and students' involvement and dialogue to create an education based on democratic principles and competences (Volume 3, p. 16). Volume two describes the observable competences for democratic culture (CDC) that are needed for these purposes.

The framework itself is not a specific curriculum or pedagogy or methodology but it aims to address various contexts to practice CDC. For instance, in terms of curriculum, developing CDC is discussed for different levels such as prescribed curriculum, institution curriculum, subject or interdisciplinary curriculum, students own learning plan (Volume 1, p. 20; Volume 3, p. 17-18). “The internal resources of learners and their competences can vary and appear differently in different contexts” (Volume 3, p. 17). Considering this, the design and implementation of curriculum empowered by CDC, should be relevant to the “real-world issues in local contexts” (Volume 3, p. 18) which are relatable to the experiences and learning processes of the learner. The framework favors student-centered practices in these matters.

Competences (CDC) are necessary for students who are expected to become a part of democracy. Educators are advised to develop democratic practices over these competences which are stated in the framework. Descriptors are vital for communicating and explaining the competences to students. “Competence descriptors are statements that describe observable behavior...” (Volume 1, p. 59). In that way, the users of the framework (the curriculum planners) can plan curriculum and assessment that can facilitate these behaviors. Educators make plans about which descriptors are related to their present context and how they should be implemented in education (Volume 1, p. 62). In that sense, the educators have influence and responsibility in how to design and implement the learning processes and assess these processes with relevant competences in the framework (Volume 1, p. 65).

Students with these competences are expected to become able individuals to function in culturally diverse and democratic social contexts, which is the focus of the framework. In culturally diverse societies, every citizen is expected to live and participate in all aspects of democratic life and democratic institutions and the society equally. Raising the citizens who have competences for dialogue with other citizens from diverse cultural backgrounds, should be one of the central goals of education for democracy (Volume 1, p. 24). In that sense, school has a central place to help to foster a democratic environment, intercultural dialogue, and interaction between school and the society. Students are expected to develop CDC in volume two by practicing them in this context. (Volume 3, p. 64-65).

The framework also acknowledges that the involvement of all stakeholders in the school community and society is the key factor to contribute to democratic life in school (Volume 3, p. 94). In that sense, inclusiveness is a principle to create a democratic school. The framework suggests every stakeholder of school should be included in every aspect of school such as school rules and policies to make school a place for democracy (Volume 3, p. 93). Schools are places for every stakeholder, including students, to be active in creating democratic culture.

Creating a school setting for democratic competences, education for citizenship (EDC) and human rights education (HRE) is an important aspect of the framework. It is argued that “research revealed that EDC and HRE are most effective in achieving their goals when they are delivered using a whole-school approach. This approach involves integrating democratic and human rights values and principles into all aspects of school life including teaching and learning methods and resources, assessment, leadership, governance and decision-making structures and processes, policies and codes of behavior, staff-staff and staff-student relationships, extracurricular activities and links with the community” (Volume 3, p. 116-117). This school setting requires a more student-centered approach and practices based on “shared responsibility” of all stakeholders especially within the school for staff and students (Volume 3, p. 30).

The framework aims for education and schools as a space for raising citizens for democracy and market by encouraging education systems, policy-makers, and educators to be more active to design education around observable competences for democratic culture (CDC) in volume two. The schools should be places where these competences to be nurtured. Even in conventional schools that do not follow the whole-school approach, it is considered possible



to present these competences by designing the courses and lessons according to the descriptors of CDC in volume two.

Inclusiveness and interaction are favored to enhance these competences in/for democratic and intercultural situations. Therefore, schools help the students to become autonomous persons by equipping them and having them practice these competences. The whole-school approach is considered as a suitable practice for that aim.

The discussion on the school in the framework goes around how to design and prepare an environment that can foster CDC in learners to make them democratic citizens. There is an important emphasis on the whole-school setting where students are encouraged to take responsibility as well as authorities' and educators' influences on aim, school setting, and content of education.

## **4.2 Conventional Approaches to Schooling**

This theme points out the conventional and standard-based characteristics of some practices which are advised to be used to support learners' acquisition of democratic competences (CDC). Creating an interactive classroom is important to make quality dialogue possible among students. Teachers are encouraged to create more democratic practices in the classroom to give a chance to every student to be heard and be active in the learning process. For instance, collaborative classroom settings are encouraged instead of "competitive settings" where student are lack of interaction and collaboration (Volume 3, p. 33). Practices such as group work where students have more opportunity to talk are encouraged and preferred instead of question-answer practices where the teacher asks questions to the whole class (Volume 3, p. 33). This type of practices aims to enhance the opportunities further for students to deploy the competences in the framework in classroom settings. The teacher organizes the lessons around observable competences to promote dialogue in a classroom as well as the learning process.

Assessment is considered as an important part of the framework. Alternative assessment methods to promote democratic competences are presented in the framework along with their strengths and limitations. Limitations of some assessment methods are pointed out such as students presenting expected behaviors which are mentioned among CDC, and the difficulties which teachers may face to choose and to use these methods. For instance, learners may use

the language that is desired by the CDC and use diaries, journals and autobiographical reflections to write and demonstrate the expected behaviors according to the list for CDC (Volume 3, p. 66). It is also pointed out that teachers may face some difficulties while conducting the assessment, for instance, on project-based learning in terms of time and training as well as issues regarding interaction with the learner and communicating the assessment results (Volume 3, p. 67). The opposite examples to mention the strengths can be presented as well. However, the feature that brings the limitations forward is that students and teachers are interacting over competences as a medium of communication and assessment.

The communication of teachers and students is based on some criteria considering the effectiveness of the acquisition of CDC. According to the framework, it is important to be careful about using these criteria while student acquires the necessary competences. One of them is reliability which “means that an assessment should produce results that are consistent and stable” even if “the same assessment procedures were to be administered again to the same learner and by a different assessor” (Volume 3, p. 55). Transparency is also important because “learners should receive in advance explicit, accurate and clear information about assessment” (Volume 3, p. 56). It is important to note that “the user of the framework” (educator) is in charge to choose the relevant assessment method (Volume 3, p. 60). It is also underlined that “assessment should always be based on valid, reliable, equitable, transparent and practical methods” (Volume 3, p. 73).

CDC is taken as a medium to facilitate education. Supporting student’s acquisition of CDC, including relevant feedback on the learners’ progress, through assessment is an important aspect of the framework. A range of assessment methods are introduced and discussed in terms of respecting student’s integrity during the assessment (Volume 3, p. 54). The user of the framework is expected to choose a suitable assessment method and strategy (Volume 3, p. 55). An important point related to assessment and feedback is how the acquisition of the CDC is communicated between the teacher and the student. Assuming that the student accepts and agrees with the descriptors of CDC as a code of conduct, assessment for empowering student has three facets; “first, assessment should enable learners not only to become aware of their achievement or level of proficiency in CDC, but also to reflect on the learning process that resulted in this particular outcome. Second, assessment should determine what is needed in order to develop these competences further. Third, assessment should enable learners to take appropriate action in relation to their own learning. In other words, assessment should contribute to learner’s ownership of their learning process” (Volume 3, p. 54).

Educators or public authority figures are influential in the planning and implementation phases of the framework. Policymakers and educators should adopt the framework according to the context of their own education systems. As their contexts change and evolve, the people in charge such as policymakers or practitioners should adapt the use of the framework accordingly (Volume 1, p. 20). The curriculum can be presented as an example for this. The framework “discusses and defines different kinds of curricula and the levels at which decisions are made concerning the nature and the contents of the curricula: from the level of a prescribed curriculum to that of the curriculum decisions taken by the teachers and learners” (Volume 3, p. 12). Besides that, it is also noted that a “prescribed curriculum must be implemented in schools” (Volume 3, p. 12). It is possible to use the framework “in planning and to analyze and audit existing plans and their implementation, in particular, the learning outcomes that such plans promote” (Volume 3, p. 12). The framework can influence education systems at different levels. In terms of “who decides the curriculum?” question, it is possible to discuss the answer in relation to different levels of the education system such as system level, institutional level, subject or classroom level, and learner level. The context that the framework is used to plan the education is important however, it is also clear that the use of the framework is open to influences from different levels of hierarchy in education systems.

There is a range of practices to be used regarding different aspects of education from assessment and classroom to school management. Their advantages and limitations are also mentioned in the framework. In general sense, the framework favors the practices that can place the learner at the center of the education. Nonetheless, it is also visible that the decisions that the policymakers and educators have influence education and students’ life in school, admitting the fact that, in a less rigid way compared to conventional schooling paradigm. Yet the framework is open to the greater influence of policy-makers and educators (the users of the framework) than students. For instance, practices for dialogue are still being planned within a classroom setting which is inherited from conventional schooling. Teachers plan these settings with an aim to assess the processes in terms of their effectiveness of the acquisition of CDC. Some elements related to assessment, such as reliability, still have some elements of positivistic thought in terms of acquiring consistent results and educators have an important role as the persons to make choices on the methods of assessment. CDC as criteria for assessment is considered as the norm which is already accepted by the learners. Lastly, the framework advises having a prescribed curriculum. All these open-ended practices and decisions made by the authorities or educators (the users of the framework) on behalf of the stu-

dents raise questions on how much learners can have the control of these processes in education.

### **4.3 Teachers Teaching the Competences**

This theme describes the role of the teacher in a school in relation to their interactions with students and their influence on students' acquisition of competences for democratic culture. Teachers plan participatory learning processes in accordance with the curriculum to increase problem-solving related to real-life issues and issues which students are interested in (Volume 3, p. 92). Activities that are related to the issues in school or in society present opportunities for practicing competences through discussions (Volume 3, p. 92). It is also advised for the users of the framework to conduct action research to assess and improve these teaching and learning experiences based on data (Volume 3, p. 92).

Teachers are in a key role not only for having a quality dialogue with students but also to identify the needs of the institution and the students for CDC, and to develop and improve activities for CDC (Volume 3, p. 26). At the classroom level, teachers are expected to adapt classroom practices for learning processes into a more democratic way such as “planning and negotiating of aims, content, learning materials, assessment and programme evaluation by all participants involved in the learning process” (Volume 3, p. 30). At the school level, school leaders and teachers “are responsible for constructing an education institution as a democratic environment where learners can participate in institution activities and institution governance” (Volume 3, p. 21).

Teachers can find alternatives to conventional schooling by organizing learning to practice CDC. Creating an environment for “collaboration and experience-sharing” helps students to collaborate and develop “openness towards cultural otherness, respect, responsibility, tolerance of ambiguity, as well as listening and observation skills, communication skills, through learning processes and activities in the classroom based on cooperative learning principles. .... The process of collaborating enables the development of openness and the motivation to accept change, an empowering process for teachers” (Volume 3, p. 17). “By applying cooperative learning principles in their work, teachers deconstruct traditional classroom practices and dislodge and deeply rooted ideas and beliefs about learning and learners, removing hierarchical, judgmental and anti-democratic systems and transforming classroom practices”

(Volume 3, p. 32). Teachers' role is to choose the suitable competences to integrate into the curriculum according to the age of the learners (Volume 3, p. 18).

Teachers are expected to adapt the competences and descriptors into their own context (Volume 1, p. 12). Teachers also should observe the student's levels of proficiency of CDC. "Two elements are essential to ensuring the development of CDC in learners; first, the possibility to assess the current level of proficiency of learners on each of the competences, with a view to identifying their needs and areas for further development, and second, references for educators which can help them to design, implement and evaluate educational interventions, in formal and non-formal settings" (Volume 1, p. 59). Teachers can create a learning environment to foster these competences in their own contexts (Volume 1, p. 62).

Teachers' and educators' position is in between making decisions to facilitate the acquisition of CDC within the curriculum, and changing the conventional schooling processes in relation to students' choices and decisions on learning. In the framework, interacting with students over curriculum is an important matter while considering how to structure the dialogue in the classroom. The framework implies that teacher and student relationships are very important in terms of acquiring CDC because this interaction constitutes an encounter of thoughts and opinions democratically. However, teachers have the responsibility to observe the development of this relationship and make decisions to facilitate learning processes while integrating CDC in the curriculum. Another point which is advised for educators to be careful about is to create a school environment to include students and be respectful to their choices.

#### **4.4 Students as Democratic Agents**

This theme captures how students are described as active agents in the framework in terms of their responsibilities and rights in school, learning, and education in relation to democratic culture. Schools are considered as places for learners to experience social life in a community and "their first encounter with public realm in schools, and schools should be places where democratic education begins" (Volume 1, p. 13). As a requirement of democracy, participation of all stakeholders is necessary. "Education institutions can implement this principle and foster 'learning democracy' by; first, the ways in which decision-making processes are organized and communicated; second, the opportunities for debate and active participation in the life of the institution; third, the degree to which relations between teachers, learners, and parents are built on mutual respect and trust" (Volume 1, p. 16). The framework suggests the

whole-school approach is a suitable option to implement democratic practices and nurture CDC. “At least three key areas need to be considered as part of a whole-school approach to develop democratic culture at schools and competences for democratic culture in learners; teaching and learning, school governance and culture, cooperation with the community” (Volume 3, p. 91).

The aim of creating democratic culture in schools is to have generations who can deal with a wide variety of social issues in a democratic society autonomously and productively. For that reason, students should be able to structure their own learning independently. “Autonomous learning skills are those skills that individuals require to pursue, organize and evaluate their own learning, in accordance with their own needs, in a self-directed and self-regulated manner, without being prompted by others. Autonomous learning skills are important for a culture of democracy because they enable individuals to learn for themselves about, and how to deal with, political, civic and cultural issues using multiple and diverse sources both far and near, rather than relying on agents in their immediate environment for the provision of information about these issues” (Volume 1, p. 46). Therefore, there is an emphasis on the agency of the students in terms of taking the responsibility for their own lives regarding the various aspects of the school.

In culturally diverse and democratic societies, it is important for an individual to be able to address the complex issues with relevant competences (Volume 1, p. 35). Framework aims to create a school environment that can equip students with these competences. That requires students to engage in conversations and social issues. For instance, one way to do that is service learning where students can address the issues in their community (Volume 3, p. 36). Another example can be given about a safe environment where students can express their own ideas and opinions.

Complex intercultural issues can be controversial. To be able to develop CDC, it is important for students to express their own feelings and ideas critically and safely within the classroom, school, or society around them. For that reason, there must be a safe learning and discussion environment for students to engage with these issues (Volume 3, p. 18). This can be done by “ensuring the classroom is a safe space where students feel able to discuss their views openly, even when their views may be controversial, by creating an open, participative and respectful classroom environment that allows all class members to share their experiences, express their

own opinions and emotions, and where the students participate in the setting and respecting of ground rules, such as listening to and respecting others” (Volume 3, p. 92).

Participation is as important as safe discussion. Students’ participation in all aspects of the school, from curriculum and learning to school government and relationships with the community, is central to learning and developing CDC. It is important to “make sure that participative approaches that the students are involved in are authentic, meaning participation as an exercise of power and a means of taking over responsibility, while clarifying conditions and limitations of participation to avoid pseudo-participation or the notion of ‘just pretending’” (Volume 3, p. 94). The framework considers that these participatory processes “reflect democratic and human rights principles” (Volume 3, p. 91).

Planning the curriculum can be given as an example to these participatory processes. It is stated in the framework that especially learners should be active in curriculum planning and their own learning (Volume 3, p. 22). “Education institutions need to ensure that their organizational structures and procedures allow for these participatory processes, with an emphasis on transparency and coherence, if they are to establish a truly democratic culture in curriculum-making” (Volume 3, p. 18).

The framework expects students to become more involved with the issues not only in their school or classrooms but also in their neighborhood or society. Students’ participation in curriculum planning or school governance is seen as creating a platform where students can have an impact on the issues that affect them. That requires deploying CDC in a safe environment for them to make their own arguments and have dialogue with all parties involved. Educators are considered as responsible people who should create a safe environment for students to live in this environment peacefully.

## **5 Discussion**

The framework addresses various issues for various educational contexts. The aim of the framework is to enhance the possibilities of democratic practices in these contexts. The competences are suggested as a medium for communicating and facilitating these practices. Since the framework addresses a wide range of issues, I aim to discuss the findings and the research questions by using thin-thick democracy analogy (Carr, 2011, p. 197-200). I argue that the conventional schooling and practices in education, which are derived from neoliberal education paradigm, falls into the thin democracy side of the spectrum while the schooling and democratic practices derived from critical pedagogy perspective fall into the thick democracy side. Some schooling practices in the framework that are inherited from conventional schooling restricts the student agency. Therefore, in order for students to be active participants in all aspects of schooling, a different paradigm than conventional schooling is necessary. My aim is to discuss these arguments around two facets of the issue which are related to my research questions; internal and external dynamics which have an influence on schooling, and student as an active democratic agent in school.

### **5.1 Internal and External Dynamics Which Have Influence on Schooling**

Education, as a component of social systems, is also a space that is shaped by the power relations. Many actors involve in defining the aim and structure of education and education systems. In the framework, the aim of education is to educate future citizens for a democratic society and for market needs. I argue that the aim of education should not be related to the market or defined by the market. When corporates and corporate culture involves in the field of education, this influence becomes visible in the form of governmentality in which the practices and aim of the education shifts towards and shaped by market needs instead of education itself (Foucault, 1991; Giroux & Giroux, 2006). In present times, this influence is the main issue in the field of education in terms of the limitations of the neoliberal education paradigm on democratic practices in schools.

The fundamental responsibility of education should not be even teaching democracy. Democracy is a way of communication, a concept to be experienced, not something to be taught. According to the framework, the responsibility of the users of the framework should be creating a democratic environment in schools, in which people can practice democratic principles



and processes without being democratized. All stakeholders, especially students, should socialize in a culture of democracy in schools. Even though there is guidance aiming for this purpose, there are some conflicting statements with this aim.

Current conventional schooling practices, such as curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical practices, are based on the neoliberal paradigm and theories such as human capital theory and social capital theory. Its aim is to educate future citizens in an effective way accordingly. Hierarchical and bureaucratic education systems are the results of neoliberal education paradigm. This approach limits the student agency in education and schooling. The need to deconstruct these practices is also emphasized in the framework (Volume 3, p. 32). Considering these two conflicting perspectives, it is possible to argue that acquiring CDC is problematic in conventional school setting and practices. It is also possible to consider the framework as an attempt to make changes in conventional schooling. The aim of this change is to promote and practice democratic culture in schools.

One of the aims of the framework is to promote democratic competences in schools by designing learning processes around descriptors that are listed in volume two of the framework. The aim here is to enrich the curriculums with CDC. However, there are obstacles, especially for conventional schools, to reach that aim. For instance, one of the conventional schooling practices in the framework is classroom. Classroom, which is a neoliberal education practice, is designed to teach the curriculum effectively for a group of students who are at the same age. There are issues about classroom practice that conflict with the concept of democratic culture in conventional schools. Firstly, students are not asked whether they want to attend the classroom or not. They do not have a say in what or how to learn either (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 425). Secondly, in the framework, classroom practice is discussed in terms of empowering students with democratic competences. The question on this issue is about whether the students are in the classroom to be democratized with democratic competences through the conventional schooling practices, such as curriculum and assessment, or to experience democracy through interactions with other people for learning and living democratically in school with a choice to be or not to be in a classroom. The practices of neoliberal education paradigm do not match the democratic practices in schools because conventional schooling practices ignore or reduce these interactions, which are necessary for creating democratic culture, to minimum (Giroux & Giroux, 2006). Classroom practice should also be questioned in terms of how democratic this practice is. The framework clearly favors student-centered practices. However, it is not possible for students to practice democratic competenc-

es in undemocratic classroom settings. Therefore, the framework attempts to promote democratic culture within a neoliberal schooling practice. Besides classroom practice, some other issues that are worth being discussed and questioned in this context.

The framework discusses curriculum and assessment in various levels from centralized decision-making processes to the level of decisions which are made by the learners based on shared responsible principle. While some recommended practices support that the decisions on curriculum and assessment should be student-centered as much as possible, there are some guidelines which I argue to be in contradiction with this claim. Educators or policymakers are the ones who are referred as the users of the framework. The users of the framework have more influence than learners in designing the curriculum and teaching/learning practices using the descriptors of competences. They are considered as the responsible persons whose aim is to facilitate competences for democratic culture and make plans according to the context of their school and education system. This type of responsibility of the users of the framework for determining the needs of the students and design the acquisition of democratic competences limits student agency. Because, in this context, the students are not equals in schools. Students are expected to acquire democratic competences in a context that is manipulated by the users of the framework (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 433). However, the acquisition of democratic competences should be around students own constructions of the concept of democracy through experience to deal with their own problems of democracy; not with problems of democracy defined by others (von Glasersfeld, 1991, p. xvii).

A prescribed curriculum is seen as a requisite for education in the framework. Considering the aim of the framework is to educate future citizen for democracy and market, it is expected to see the influence of the policymaker or corporate values on a prescribed curriculum, as observed in the current schooling practices of neoliberal education paradigm. In the framework, the users of the framework have more influence on decisions about the content of this prescribed curriculum. This situation is a limitation for the student agency. A prescribed curriculum should not be a must but a proposal to be discussed with, first and foremost, the learners, and school community with all its stakeholders as, also, proposed in the framework. As a requirement of democracy, this mode of communication and negotiation is closer to the thick democracy side of the spectrum. Because, in that case, the level of influence of different stakeholders in school becomes equal which is different from the current conventional schooling practices.

It is assumed in the framework that students have already accepted or should accept that these competences are “good”. When it comes to curriculum design, it is important to respect the choices that the learners make (Lobok, 2012b, p. 73). Yet, the users of the framework are expected to be responsible for making curriculum and to design assessment accordingly around “good” democratic competences in the framework. However, this idea assumes that the users of the framework are competent to understand and realize what every student needs to acquire democratic culture. There are three issues regarding this assumption. First, this argument begs the question about power relations such as whether the users of the framework are making decisions through curriculum design on behalf of the students when it comes to the acquisition of competences for democratic culture? The second assumption is that the students’ understanding of democratic culture is limited as default, therefore the users of the framework should choose the relatable competences for students. Third, within the limitations of a course curriculum, teachers’ perceptions on students’ democratic competences can be limited than expected. The users of the framework can help to construct learning opportunities around the competences. However, this act should not be an initiation of learning or deciding an end goal for democratic culture. Presuming the users of the framework being the interlocutors in a democratic school, it should be a response to the learners’ requests on the relevant issues of democracy so that students can construct their own understanding of democracy and democratic culture (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 425; von Glasersfeld, 1991, p. xvii)

Assessment is to be used to assess the effectiveness of the curricula in application and the learner’s achievements. It is the users of the framework who design the assessment based on the assumption that they should inform the learners about their progress with these competences in the framework, assess the learner’s development, and expect “learner’s ownership of their process” (Volume 3, p. 54). I would like to remind two examples from the framework. First, it is mentioned in the framework that one of the problems in assessment is seen as students’ (possible negative) attitudes towards the assessment methods. It is pointed out that the students may pretend as if they acquired the competences which are presented through the course designed by the users of the framework. The second example is about the mindset of assessment. When the teacher discusses the progress with their students, they are expected to give students clear and accurate feedback based on the assessment method which is chosen by the teacher. Matusov et al. (2016) address the issues in these two examples while discussing the categories of student agency. These two examples have some elements from both effortful

agency and dynamically emergent agency. Choosing the most suitable assessment method means that the user of the framework is in control of the learning processes as well. As a result of manipulating the learning process and the context with an expectation from student to acquire democratic competences, it is possible to observe unexpected behaviors from the student. Because the student is not completely the author of her/his learning process (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 433).

Teachers choose the assessment method and design the course based on their expertise as professionals. The assessment “should always be based on reliable, equitable, transparent, and practical methods” (Volume 3, p. 73). These methods are the ones that are already in use within conventional schooling. Their compatibility should be discussed in terms of how or if they can be used or be adapted for thicker democracy settings in schools. For instance, characteristics of reliability are defined in the framework as; “an assessment should produce results that are consistent and stable (even if) the same assessment procedure were to be administered again to the same learner and by different assessor” (Volume 3, p. 55). This can be considered as an example of positivistic as well as neoliberal mindset. Personalization of the relationship between human and knowledge depends on “the ability to work with inconsistencies” (Iobok, 2012b, p. 73). Considering the complexities of democratic settings in schools, this type of complex issue of personalization of human-knowledge relationship cannot be reduced to consistent assessment criteria as it is argued in the framework.

The practices which are mentioned so far conflict with the statements in the framework regarding the whole school approach. The whole school approach is advised as the most suitable approach for practicing competences for democratic culture. This approach is an important discussion while questioning conventional schooling practices. The framework recommends that including all stakeholders into all aspects of school is a democratic approach. This inclusive approach is based on “shared responsibility” (Volume 3, p. 30). Based on the statements in the framework, this inclusive approach is similar to education as a community view mentioned by Gardner and Crockwell (2006) where all stakeholders have influence on all aspects of school. Therefore, in the whole-school approach, as described in the framework, lays the foundation of how the educational ideology and practices can be influenced by all stakeholders in a school community through democratic participation. However, since the document is a framework, the whole-school approach is not discussed in detail.

The users of the framework have influence on the design and assessment of the learning processes. According to the framework, they also have responsibility for giving assessment feedback to students about their progress of acquiring democratic competences. The practices discussed so far show that there are some conflicting practices with the authorial agency of the students in terms of curriculum and assessment processes. However, there are some practices that aim to support authorial agency as well. The influence of the users of the framework is more in terms of the decision that are made to design the learning processes and assessment to make students acquire democratic competences. That means, even though the framework aims to be closer to the thick democracy side of the spectrum, authorial student agency is still under the influence of the users of the framework and some practices of the neoliberal education paradigm.

## **5.2 Student as an Active Democratic Agent in School**

The concept of student agency, as defined in the framework, fits into the concepts of authorial agency (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 434) and participative agency (Davis, 2003, p.2). The aim of the framework is to help students to become democracy literate individuals (Carr, 2011, p. 191). Students are expected to form their own ideas in practices such as learning, (Lobok, 2012b, p. 73), school governance and interactions with society (Gardner & Crockwell, 2006, p. 13). According to the framework, creating a school setting for students to practice authorial and participative agency is considered as the responsibility of the educators. However, there are some issues in the framework that limit the space that learners can practice their agency and their power in the politics of school. The extent of these limits depends on the quality of interaction between all stakeholders, especially educators and students since they are the main actors in interactions in schools.

The framework recommends some platforms for students to practice their political power in schools, such as participating in decision-making processes, service learning, safe discussion environment, and using the framework for students' own learning plans. However, the frequent emphasis on the choices that the users of the framework contradicts with these statements. The guidance that is advised for the users of the framework has similarities with thin-democratic schooling practices, as I argued in the previous section. The users of the framework are expected to have more influence than students on how to design a safe and democratic education and learning. Therefore, it is possible to argue that there are some elements

that are inherited from conventional schooling since the users of the framework have more responsibility in schooling practices. However, in order for students to practice their agency in a democratic environment in schools, even the taken-for-granted schooling practices should be discussed and negotiated with students as a sign of quality interaction based on shared responsibility for democracy and democratic practices in schools. In that context, the authorial agency is aimed in the framework but there are two issues that contradicts with authorial agency. One of them is the tendency to control how democratic competences to be acquired. The other one is the emphasis on more responsibility for the users of the framework to design the learning and living practices for democratic culture in schools. These two issues are also related to the interactions of the individuals in the schools.

Student agency is not the opposite of teacher agency. Therefore, some aspects of the guidance that is recommended for the users of the framework about how to manage the process of acquisition of democratic competences are problematic. The guidance for managing this process becomes a restriction on student agency because the student should be the subject and active agent, not the object of “democratization”. To be able to reach that, teachers and students need to share the responsibility of learning and living together (Zygmantas, 2009, p. 73; Gardner & Crockwell, 2006, p. 13). This is a requirement of having a responsible dialogue on issues related to all aspects of school so that students can make their own decisions consciously (Bai, 2006, p. 10-11). The teacher-student dichotomy in the framework is a limitation on student agency since there is a difference regarding taking the responsibility of education which also creates some sort of hierarchy (Baldissoni, 2010, p. 23).

Teachers always interact with students as a natural process of being in the same social environment. Teachers have a political stance regarding the school issues and learning as much as students do. Equal chance for everybody to make their own decisions regarding these processes is necessary to promote the democratic culture in schools as already accepted in the framework. This aim is explained as creating a safe environment for students to express their ideas and feelings freely. During these interactions, students are in the making of their own worlds as well as traveling the worlds of others Bai (2006, p. 10-11). In other words, they are the authors of their acquisition (Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2016, p. 434). Democracy, as explained throughout the framework, is a way of communication with respect. Therefore, the focus of the discussion here should be on how to create a more democratic environment together to practice democratic competences instead of how to make students acquire necessary competences. This approach is closer to thick democracy in schools in terms of the

characteristics of the interaction which is not based on teacher-student dichotomy as in conventional schools. Teachers' attitude affects the quality of these interactions and the quality of democratic culture in schools.

The status that teachers need in school, in terms of using their political power, is to have an equal responsibility with students. They should not have a title as the users of the framework. Their responsibility is to interact with students as teachers being experienced learners. If the teachers can be trusted on how to design and implement courses around the competences in the framework, they can also be trusted on how to interact with their students based on democratic values and practices as mentioned throughout the competences. The latter is a rather complex environment for teachers as well as students since it is a less planned and controlled environment. Therefore, keeping the complexity of this context in mind, there is a need for the users of the framework to re-think their approaches to schooling practices which are inherited from the conventional schooling mindset. This effort is also recommended in the framework (Volume 3, p. 32). A democratic mindset should aim to eradicate this teacher-student border in conventional schooling (Baldissoni, 2010, p. 23). This approach prevents the need to make a definition of a fixed notion of student who needs to learn what is "good". Student agency can become more apparent in this type of context. Because what limits students authorial and participative agency is what the users of the framework consider as the good for the students to learn democracy. I argue that a school setting which can address this control issue in a democratic way is closer to a more suitable approach for thick democracy in schools.

Shared responsibility and teacher-student dichotomy issues may raise some concerns about how to control or manage a school while creating a democratic space. The schooling that creates a democratic environment for students and how democratic it is, depends on the limits of control of the users of the framework have. In other words, democratic schooling relies on how much the users of the framework, educators or people in charge, can abandon the power of control (or the illusion of control) and how much this power of control is shared with all stakeholders, but especially students. Every education system and every school has its own context and social relationships. Every stakeholder of each school community has their own influences on school issues in a democratic school. The agency of students depends on how much these interactions are based on responsible dialogue and the qualities of this communication. This power of communication is the core issue of democracy in education and school. The users of the framework should become equals to be able to experience democratic prac-

tices and democratic mechanisms within the school where students take responsibility for their dialogue that they have with all stakeholders.



## 6 Conclusion

The neoliberal education paradigm has produced its own practices such as classrooms, grades, hierarchical school structure and certain approaches for curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. The framework challenges these practices by positioning the students in the center of the decision-making process to promote democracy in education. In the framework, the student is defined as an active, autonomous agent of change who can participate, discuss, learn by taking responsibility for their actions regarding these processes. On the other hand, the framework adapts some conventional schooling practices with an aim to foster democratic competences. The restrictions on students' decision-making via assessment, curriculum have traces of thin democracy and neoliberal paradigm.

There is a large body of literature on education that has been created within/for the neoliberal education paradigm. The framework has some of these elements of conventional schooling and there is not a complete detachment from the influence of neoliberal literature on schooling practices. However, it is not possible to say that this framework can be located within the neoliberal education paradigm either. Schooling practices for thin democracy aims neoliberal individual. Hence it creates schooling structure for this aim. On the other hand, thick democracy needs to aim for democratic individual and should build structures with this aim in mind. The framework offers the latter to some extent.

The framework can be located towards the thick democracy side of the spectrum. The framework offers a discussion on how to change the definition of the student from “a business project” to “a political and democratic project”. Therefore, the framework aims for thick democracy in schools, which means that it is an attempt to create anomalies within the current conventional education systems to reach a more democratic environment where the student can acquire the necessary competences. Even though it is possible for students to acquire necessary competences for democratic culture in conventional schools, a new paradigm which is based on democratic values and principles is required to reach what is aimed for student agency in the framework. The current conventional schooling practices present a limited space to realize that goal. The framework has started a promising discussion about how to prepare a more democratic school and education for all states in the international community of the Council of Europe. I argue that the discussion for this aim should not be about how to democratize current educational practices but how to have a more democratic education. This

requires a paradigm change from how to do what we already do democratically towards how to build a literature and practices for a “thicker” democratic education. If the aim is to give the students’ place in the center of education back, the users of the framework should aim to let students construct the concept of democracy in schools from the beginning (von Glasersfeld, 1991, p. xvii).

## **7 Ethical Considerations**

Two issues about ethical considerations can be discussed about this study; accessibility of the data and accuracy of the analysis. I used the reference framework of competences for democratic culture as the data in this study. The document is open to the public for discussions, implementation, the feedback from the schools and educators that practice the framework, and improvement of the content. As a researcher, my aim is to contribute to the discussions on how to promote democratic culture in schools. Regarding the framework, there are two aspects of this research to be focused on; understanding the role of the student in education while practicing democracy in schools and the expected school context to realize democratic schooling. These two issues require me to be critical of the document. Giroux (2005, p. 207) states that “... a critical theory of both structure and agency can be developed that engenders an oppositional radical educational language in order to point to new questions, possibilities, and struggles”. I have tried to be loyal to the data throughout my analysis while also being critical of the framework. The arguments that I have made are, of course, open to further discussions. The accuracy of the findings can be evaluated by the readers by referring to the framework along with this thesis (Creswell, 2014, p. 99).

## 8 Limitations

I have analyzed only one of many aspects of the framework, which is student agency. Even though I tried to limit the discussion to the concept of student agency from the perspective of critical pedagogy and the shortcomings of the conventional schooling to implement the framework, there are many aspects to be discussed such as citizenship education, intercultural dialogue and education, and Bildung. For that reason, the framework should be discussed from a wider perspective.

Bildung is explicitly stated as the foundation of the framework. Bildung is an influential tradition in education. It has been discussed and evolved throughout centuries. I could spend limited time, more than 3 months, to prepare this study and I could not engage with this aspect of the framework. If the research were conducted by a more experienced researcher and in a wider time frame, it could have been more possible to approach the concept of student agency from different perspectives considering different theories, such as Bildung.

I benefited from some concepts in the poststructuralist paradigm such as deconstruction and governmentality along with critical pedagogy. Even though they guided me through the research process, discussing these concepts requires more time. Discussing the concept of student agency from critical pedagogy and poststructuralist perspective can contribute to efforts for student-centered education further along with Bildung.

## 9 Further Research

There are many possibilities for further research related to the framework. The framework is the core of an on-going campaign. There are schools across Europe which are practicing the framework in their own contexts. Regarding student agency, it is possible to collaborate with these schools and conduct various types of research such as action research, ethnographic research, narrative inquiry or phenomenographic analysis.

Comparative studies are also possible to research various aspects of education systems or schools that use the framework in relation to student agency in different contexts. Many aspects of the framework such as intercultural dialogue or citizenship education can also be explored within these contexts. The four main categories of competences regarding values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding could be researched in terms of how the learning processes are designed around these competences in the pilot schools and their contributions to democratic practices. These schools are currently providing data to the campaign to be used for the evaluation phase.

To keep the research more focused on a specific context, another possible research could be about the compatibility of the Finnish education system and schools practicing and promoting CDC. It is possible to analyze how Finnish education system may design/have designed curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices for this purpose. Another possible research related to Finnish context (or any other particular context) is to start an action research to analyze the use of the framework and the concept of student agency in Finnish schools.

Additionally, it is possible to conduct studies at the level of policymaking on how to develop a new model of accountability to reduce the neoliberal influence and increase more socially interactive accountability to prepare a more feasible environment for democratic education and student agency in Finland or any other particular context.

A similar study can be designed to create more democratic assessment and curriculum by placing the student agency in the center of these processes with the contributions of the perspective of critical pedagogy and various educational alternatives.

The whole-school approach is considered as the most suitable setting for CDC in the framework. The schools which follow the whole-school approach can provide data on the imple-

mentation of the framework to analyze student agency. There could be pilot schools in Europe that implement the framework within the whole-school approach.

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